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GOVERNANCE IN HAITI:
Strengthening the States and Democratic Development

November 1996

Canadian Foundation for the Americas

Canadian Foundation for the Americas
(FOCAL)

Report on a conference entitled

"Governance in Haiti: Strengthening the State and Democratic Development"

held in Ottawa,
November 7-8, 1996

Organization

The Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) organized, in November 1996, a conference on the topic of governance in Haiti. The purpose of the conference was to allow participants to discuss issues pertaining to strengthening the state and democratic development. The presentations and discussion periods that followed were organized along three axes:

- **Law, Order, and Democracy** which covered the role of the current United Nations (UN) mission, the role of the young *Police Nationale d'Haïti* (PNH), the evolution and purpose of the current judiciary reform, as well as the overall role of the State in this area of activity;

- **The Economy, Strengthening the State, and Democracy** which covered the current economic situation, allowing for the identification of sectors crucial to Haiti's economic development, as well as the links between the State and the economy, and between democratic and economic development;

- **Social Development and Democracy** which covered development priorities in the area of health and social services, the role of NGOs and their relationship with the Haitian government, as well as possible mandates and/or actions for the State in this area.

Presenters came from both within Haitian society and outside, namely Canada and the United States. The keynote speaker was Madame Claudette Werleigh, former Prime Minister of Haiti under President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Madame Werleigh provided an excellent introduction to the points at issue.

The agenda of the conference had been designed to ensure the widest spectrum of options would be presented at every panel. In most cases, views were conflictive which led to insightful debate and discussion.

Close to 135 representatives of various sectors of Canadian society – academia, government, NGOs – registered for the conference, making it a great achievement in terms of the number of participants and the variety of their interests. Several representatives of the Canadian-Haitian community were among the audience and participated actively during the discussion.

The event was budgeted at $45,000, including a contribution of $20,000 from the John Holmes Fund. All deliverables, including follow-up on the Haiti file as well as the production of a public education document, are coming in on time and within budget.

The document, a report containing the text of the presentations as well as conclusions and policy recommendations, is being produced under the direction of Denis Berthiaume, the project officer at FOCAL responsible for the organization of the conference. The final edited draft is expected no later than May 31, 1997. The report will be distributed to all participants of the conference and will be available to the public following the initial distribution.

Conclusions

Some draft conclusions about state and democratic development in Haiti were offered by most presenters at the conference. These comments tended to synthesize aspects drawn from the three axes of discussion.

- Whatever scenario is put forward for the development of Haiti – democratic, economic, or social – should be the result of long-term planning rather than simply an attempt to fix short- or medium-term development problems. The shortsighted approach currently in use can only lead to short- or medium-term solutions to Haiti's problems.

- Although a great portion of the technical expertise currently involved in Haiti comes from the international community – governmental and non governmental – Haitians must remain a driving element of the development process. In some cases, a more participative approach should be adopted in order to ensure that solutions put forward reflect the realities of life in Haiti.

- Although the situation in Haiti has somewhat improved in the past few years, it remains critical. The international community ought to realize that development in Haiti can only be the result of concerted and committed action on their part. There is no room for competition among donor countries or between international agencies. International aid also must be sustained in order to ensure that measures are carried through until their full implementation.

- The State in Haiti urgently needs to be deeply reformed. Years of repression have led to the establishment of state machinery that hinders democratic, economic, and social development.

Since the State is the best provider of some – not all – types of service in those three areas, it should not be dismantled. Rather its mandate should be modified according to the needs of the Haitian population, in light of overall development imperatives.

With respect to **Law, Order, and Democracy**, the following conclusions were offered by some of the participants:

- Although political stability seems to be reestablished, citizen security is in no way assured. Criminal groups are increasingly active and prevent Haitians from enjoying rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

- The PNH must be turned into an effective police force. Currently, its members rely too much on the presence of military contingents under the auspices of the UN. PNH agents have to enjoy proper logistical support to be able to accomplish the tasks for which they have been hired.

- Although the judiciary is currently being reformed and improved, the results will not be satisfactory if the correctional system is not also improved. The current situation is one more obstacle to an adequate administration of justice in Haiti.

- In order to strengthen the State and ensure adequate democratic development in Haiti, political groupings have to be turned into real political parties, venues for discussion and debate have to be provided to the population, and popular participation has to be sought by the State.

With respect to **the Economy, Strengthening the State, and Democracy**, the following conclusions were offered by some participants:

- International institutions and donor countries appear confident that the current structural adjustment measures will lead Haiti out of its unbearable poverty onto the early stages of a stable development process. However, Haitian organizations seem to believe that the postulates emanating from the "Washington Consensus" are fundamentally wrong. There is a need for further assessment of the economic situation in Haiti, as well as identification of consensual long-term development objectives.

- Agriculture remains the most important sector of the Haitian economy in terms of percentages of both workforce and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Rather than attempting to develop mainly the Haitian industrial sector, international aid donors should focus their efforts on improving current agricultural practices. Such a strategy would have a better long-

term effect on the economy than the current approach of neglecting the agricultural sector.

- Although some infrastructures are in place, there is a need to greatly expand the current network before attempting to launch other projects. The private sector will remain reluctant to become involved if basic infrastructures, allowing for the development of a private sector, do not exist.

- Haitians living abroad will increasingly be called upon for their contribution to the economic development of Haiti. They can provide technical knowledge and financial support together with a genuine understanding of the Haitian society.

With respect to **Social Development and Democracy**, some participants offered the following conclusions:

- NGOs have assumed a key role in the provision of health and social services to the Haitian population in the past mainly because the repressive nature of the State tended to ignore those areas. Today, the NGOs' dominant position is seen as an obstacle by those who envisage a greater role for the State in this sector. There is a need for discussion about the role of NGOs in Haiti and their relationship with the Government. The international community should also review some of its funding practices which tend to exacerbate tensions between NGOs and the Government. A consensual approach should be adopted to harmonize the variety of development policies currently at work in Haiti.

- NGOs have long served as a mechanism of political participation. Although they sometimes compete with the State, they should be kept in place until mature political institutions which favour political participation are ready to take over.

Policy Recommendations for Canada

Haiti

The current Canadian participation in Haiti may not be the most appropriate. It appears that a short-term, piecemeal approach has been favoured, and the results are not encouraging. Canadian troops in Haiti see their mandate renewed over and over in order to maintain a safe and stable environment. Efforts are made to reform the judicial system, but crime is on the rise and jails are packed – in some cases with innocent people. Poverty is alleviated in some parts of the country, but everyone doubts how long the relief will last.

It is not acceptable that in a hemisphere where economic development is generally on the rise –

and of which Canada prides itself as being a member – one country remains in such a state of democratic, economic, and social devastation. Canada should develop a long-term, coherent approach towards Haiti. Although one country alone cannot accomplish the Herculean task ahead, it can surely lead the way in developing a sound strategy for international cooperation in this area.

At the same time, Haiti needs a blitz intervention: tremendous amounts of money in every sector of democratic, economic, and social life. The international community has to release adequate funds and technical assistance. The longer it waits to give the necessary push to development, the more money will be spent in projects that address short-term needs. If appropriate action is taken now, the cost of rescuing Haiti – in the long term – will be much less than simply resuscitating it for many years.

Governance

In the area of **Law, Order, and Democracy**, Canada should realize from its current activities in Haiti that no measure will bring long-term results if it tackles only one aspect of this sphere of activities. For instance, supporting a newly created police force to maintain a safe and stable environment without concurrently reforming the judicial system will lead nowhere, nor will reforming the judiciary system take hold without concurrently reforming the correctional system.

In the area of **the Economy, Strengthening the State, and Democracy**, Canada should realize the impact that democratic development has on economic development, and vice versa. No attempt at providing economic growth will be successful without solid democratic institutions in place. Nor will an attempt at strengthening democratic institutions of the State succeed if there is no encouragement of economic development.

In the area of **Social Development and Democracy**, Canada should note the pitfalls of a strategy that lacks coherence. For instance, financing NGOs and governments in sectors where they become competitors, rather than collaborators, cannot lead to great development results. Canada should favour a consensual approach among all development actors in a given country, which will lead to the harmonization of all its development policies directed to that country.

Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL)
Ottawa, April 29, 1997